



# HOW TO PREPARE YOUR DOG FOR A BABY

Babies are a wonderful, exciting new life that will be brought into your world. You'll be able to share the love of this small little human with your dogs too, keeping a calm and relaxed household where everybody gets along. We're here to help you reach that goal and make sure that your furry friend gets to retain his place in your family.

## First: Lets Make a Plan

Your dog will benefit from any training you can do before the baby is born. When a child comes into your life, it takes time and attention away from our pets. This can cause jealousy and behavior issues. By preparing your pup ahead of time, you can avoid all of that mess.

- Teaching your dog some basic obedience skills will help you manage her behavior when the baby comes. Obedience classes can help socialize your dog as well as make training easier.
- Four months before the baby arrives. Gradually introduce your dog to the new experiences, sights, sounds and smells they will encounter when you bring your baby home, and associate these new things with rewards. This will help your dog learn to love life with the baby. Some examples: Baby powder, crying baby sounds via youtube, putting up the crib and playpen.
- One to two months before the baby arrives: Anticipate the changes you'll make to your dog's daily routine, and start making those changes. One of the hardest things for dogs is the suddenness of the changes. If we have our dog already adapted to a new routine, the baby won't be quite as big of a deal.

## Second: Skills to learn

Here's a list of some useful skills that will make your life easier when your baby arrives.

- Sit and down
- Stay, wait at doors and settle: These skills can help your dog learn to control her impulses, and they'll prove useful in many situations. For example, you can teach your dog to lie down and stay whenever you sit in your nursing chair.
- Leave it and drop it: These two behaviors can help you teach your dog to leave the baby's things alone.
- Greet people politely: A jumping dog can be annoying at best—and dangerous at worst—when you're holding the baby.
- Relax in a crate: If you crate train your dog, you'll know that they are safe when you can't supervise them, and your dog will have a cozy place of their own to relax when things get hectic.
- Come when called

These are all skills that we teach in our training classes!

## Three: Lifestyle Changes

If you can predict how your schedule will change when the baby comes, begin a slow transition toward that new schedule now. If you plan to nap in the afternoon when the baby is sleeping, start taking occasional afternoon naps. If you plan to walk your dog at different times of day, gradually switch to the new routine.

Life with a baby can be hectic and sometimes unpredictable. It may help to prepare your dog for a less consistent daily schedule. Try varying the time you feed your dog. For example, if your dog gets breakfast every morning at 7:00 A.M. sharp, start feeding them at random times between 6:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

Consider hiring a dog walker to take over the responsibility of exercising your dog, at least for the first few weeks after the baby arrives. Interview dog walkers and choose one now. To help your dog get used to leaving your house without you, you can have the dog walker start taking her on occasional walks.

If your dog enjoys playing with other dogs, consider taking them to a doggie daycare once or twice a week after the baby comes. Investigate your options now, and have your dog spend time at the daycare so you're your dog gets used to this new activity. Alternatively, you can plan to take your dog to friends' or family members' houses once or twice a week for some quality time with people they know and likes. Begin these visits now.

If you're really ambitious, you can practice getting up in the middle of the night with your dog. Teach them to settle quietly in an area where you plan to nurse the baby.

Resist the temptation to lavish your dog with extra attention in the weeks before the baby's due date. This will only set them up for a bigger letdown when the baby comes and takes center stage. Instead, start scheduling short play and cuddle sessions with your dog, and gradually give them less and less attention at other times of day. Schedule your sessions randomly so that your dog doesn't come to expect attention at any particular time.

When the baby comes home, some of your dog's privileges will likely change. It will be easiest for them to accept these changes if you institute new rules in advance. If you don't want your dog on the furniture or the bed after the baby arrives, introduce that restriction now.

If you don't want your dog to jump up on you when you're carrying your new baby or holding him in your lap, start teaching your dog to keep all four of paws on the floor.

If your dog is used to sleeping in bed with you and you want that to change with the baby's arrival, provide a comfortable dog bed that they can use instead. If necessary, you can place the new bed in an exercise pen or a crate to prevent jumping up onto your bed during the night. Likewise, if you want your dog to sleep in another room when the baby arrives, establish this habit well in advance.

Even if your dog adores children, they might accidentally scratch your baby's delicate skin while riding beside him in the car. Consider installing a car barrier, purchasing a dog seatbelt or teaching your dog to relax in a crate when they are in the car. You can find barriers, special seatbelts and crates at most major pet stores.

Having a vocal dog in your home can be a great deterrent to burglars, and many people appreciate their dog's watchdog skills. However, when your baby's trying to take a nap, your dog's barking at falling leaves, neighbors and scurrying squirrels outside will get old very quickly. Now is the time to start teaching them that they don't have to be quite so vigilant.

Some people decide that they'd like their dog to wait outside the baby's room unless invited in. The easiest way to accomplish this is to teach your dog to sit-stay or down-stay by the door.

When you're not training, keep the baby's door closed or install a tall baby gate in the doorway so that your dog gets used to restricted access.

## **Four: Preparing your Dog**

For dogs who haven't spent much time with them, babies can seem like pretty bizarre—and even frightening—creatures. They make loud, screeching noises, they smell different, they definitely don't look like grown-up humans, and they move in strange ways. It's a good idea to introduce your dog to as many baby-like sights, sounds, smells and movements as possible so that some aspects of the baby are familiar when you bring him home.

Unwrap new baby supplies, such as toys, car seats, highchairs and swings, from their packaging and introduce them to your dog one or two at a time. You can also place smaller items on the floor when you're around to supervise your dog. Let the dog investigate them, but if they pick up the items, immediately redirect the dog's attention to one of their own toys or chew bones. (Keep in mind that it might be difficult for your dog to tell the difference between dog toys and the baby's! That's why it's important to help start learning now).

Start to use a little bit of the baby's lotions, shampoos, creams and powders on yourself so that your dog associates them with a familiar person. If you can, borrow clothes and blankets that smell like a baby to get the dog used to that smell, too.

If your dog is sensitive to strange noises, they might become agitated or frightened when they hear the baby cry. To help your dog get used to the sound in advance, purchase a recording of realistic baby noises and play it frequently. Whenever you play the recording, give your dog plenty of attention, treats and anything else they like. After 5 to 10 minutes, turn the recording off and ignore your dog for half an hour or so. Do this several times a day. Instead of becoming afraid or upset when they hears baby sounds, your dog will learn to look forward to them because they predict attention and treats! If you try this procedure and find that your dog seems really afraid of the recorded baby noises, you may need to start with the volume very low. When they gets used to the sound at a low level, you can gradually increase the volume. Remember to give plenty of delicious treats, like bits of cheese, hot dog or chicken, every time they hears the baby sounds.

Poke your dog gently and then give them a treat. Gently tug on their ear and then give a treat. Gently grab skin or pinch and then give a treat. In a cheery voice, say something like "Oh, what was that?" each time you poke, pull or pinch your dog. Later on, when the baby does these things, you can say the same phrase. With repetition, your dog will start to anticipate tasty treats and simply look to you each time gets pinched or grabbed. Practice these handling exercises four to eight times per day, and use especially exciting treats. (Training sessions can be short—about five minutes long). When you start your training, be very gentle. Over time, make your touches more intense, like they will be when the baby delivers them. Remember: Children should be supervised around dogs at all times. Imagine that your dog is a backyard pool, and that your child should never be alone with your dog.

## **Five: Bringing the baby home**

When bringing your baby home from the hospital, send everyone else into the house first so your dog can express their usual excitement to see people. After they had a minute or two of greeting time and expends some energy, have someone leash the dog. This is important, even if you have no reason to believe that they'll react poorly to the baby. That person should also get some small treats ready to use during your dog's first few moments with the baby. (It may help to prepare these treats in advance and keep them in a container near the front door).

It's crucial to stay calm and relaxed when you and the baby enter the house. If you seem nervous and jumpy, your dog will pick up on your feelings and may become nervous as well, thinking that the bundle in your arms is something to worry about. Instead, speak to your dog in a soft but cheerful voice as you walk into the house. Have your helper distract the pup with plenty of treats so that their attention is divided between them, your baby and the other people present. The helper can ask your dog to respond to obedience cues, like sit and down, using the treats to reward polite behavior. Praise your dog for any calm interest in the baby. Avoid scolding your dog. Remember, you want the dog to associate the baby with good things, not your displeasure.

Whether you choose to allow your dog to investigate the baby right away or to wait until a later time, orchestrate the event carefully. Choose a quiet room, and sit down with the baby in your arms. Have a helper leash your dog and bring them into the room. Again, avoid nervous or agitated behavior. Talk to your dog in a calm, happy voice as you invite them to approach. Convince your pup that meeting and interacting with a new friend is fun, not stressful.

If your dog's body language is relaxed and friendly, have your friend walk toward you and the baby, keeping the leash short but loose. If they want to, let your dog sniff the baby as you continue to speak softly. Praise your dog warmly for gentle investigation.

Even if your dog seems curious and calm, you may feel a little nervous about letting them get close to the infant. That's normal for new parents and perfectly reasonable. Initially, you might feel most comfortable allowing only brief interactions. Let your dog sniff the baby's feet for a couple of seconds. Then gently end the investigation by praising and asking them to sit or lie down. Reward for complying with a few small, tasty treats. (Your helper can hand them to you or deliver the rewards to your dog himself). If you like, repeat this sequence a few times. Then have your helper distract your dog with a new chew bone or a food puzzle toy.

As the baby settles in, continue to focus on associating him with good things for your dog. You may be tempted to give the dog plenty of attention when the baby's asleep and then try to get the dog to lie down, be quiet and leave you alone while the baby's awake. It's actually much better to do the opposite. Try to give your dog lots of attention when the baby is present. Teach that when he's around, the pup gets treats, petting, playing—and anything else they like. When you feed the baby, you can feed your dog, too. When you walk your dog, do your best to take the baby along. (Baby "backpacks" and slings are great for dog parents). This strategy, though it requires some skillful multitasking on your part, teaches your dog a valuable lesson. They'll learn to love it when the baby is awake and active because that's when good things happen for them.

Obviously, giving both the baby and your dog attention at the same time is easier if there are two adults in the home. But when that's not possible, you can still accomplish a lot by holding your baby in your lap while you talk to your dog and pet them, give treats or toss a ball. Also teach your dog that when your baby isn't around, things get very boring. Your dog can be with you, but try to ignore them most of the time. This will have your dog eagerly anticipate the baby's next active time and help them bond with the baby.

As often as possible, reward your dog for behaving politely when they are close to the baby. Encouraging calm, controlled behavior now will pay off in the weeks and months ahead—as your baby becomes more and more interesting and exciting to your dog. If someone in your family has time, consider taking your dog to a group obedience class or hiring a private trainer to show you how to teach the basics in your own home. A well-trained dog will make your first few days, weeks, months and even years with your child much easier!

Never force your dog to interact with your baby. Let them approach the baby on their own. When they seem nervous, speak softly and praise for bravely investigating.